

New York Daily News - <http://www.nydailynews.com>**Lung illness takes an angel of Ground Zero**

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A nun who spent six months tending to rescue workers at Ground Zero has died from a respiratory disease she believed was caused by exposure to toxic air in lower Manhattan.

Sister Cindy Mahoney, 54, choked to death in her own bed Wednesday morning in Aiken, S.C., after a long and debilitating fight against lung problems.

"She died gasping for air," said lawyer David Warby, who represents about 8,000 Ground Zero workers. "This is a tragic exclamation point to Sept. 11."

Mahoney had asked before she died that an autopsy be performed to aid the legal battle being waged by heroes who say they have Ground Zero-related illnesses.

An Episcopal nun who also worked as a paramedic, Mahoney spent months helping victims and tending to the spiritual needs of first responders.

She never regretted racing to lower Manhattan on 9/11, said her best friend, Alice Sullivan.

"She was a wonderful, wonderful woman," Sullivan said. "Her passion was doing something for the other rescue workers."

Mahoney never smoked and never had any health woes, but, like many Ground Zero workers, she soon started suffering from respiratory woes.

Her health problems were only exacerbated by insurance issues that made it difficult for her to get proper care - capped by her discharge from a hospice two weeks ago.

The Daily News has uncovered widespread health woes among Ground Zero workers.

"We know that so many are now suffering health effects from breathing the toxic air at Ground Zero," said Sen. Hillary Clinton. "Yet there are still some who doubt the link. By raising attention to her own devastating illness, Sister Mahoney will continue as she did in life, to help those affected by 9/11."